



Communist University Introductions

These texts may be used as “openings to discussion” of the original reading texts that are supplied by the CU. They are not intended to be authoritative or conclusive. They are contributions to discussion like any other such contributions. The introductions are not a substitute for the reading texts.

State and Revolution, Part 6



[Paris, March 18, 1871](#)

The Paris Commune, 1871

The main text (attached) is the third part of Lenin's "Generic Course" on The State and Revolution. It is devoted to the Paris Commune [pictured in the photograph, above, and memorialised in Soviet artwork, below] and to the lessons that Karl Marx in particular drew from that experience.

Marx's work "[The Civil War in France](#)" was written during, and immediately after, the events of early 1871 in Paris. Lenin's summary of Marx, as usual, is brief but misses very little. Lenin's summary itself has its highlights and these are what we will note here.

The first is where Lenin notes that Marx would have made a correction to the [Communist Manifesto](#) of 1848 on the basis of the experience of the Paris Commune. In 1871 Marx wrote: *"...the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery and wield it for its own purposes"* – by which he meant that proletariat had to *"to smash the bureaucratic-military machine"* and to replace it with a state that is *"the proletariat organized as the ruling class"* and as an *"armed people"* that had disbanded the bourgeoisie's *"special bodies of armed men"*.



Lenin wrote:

"Marx did not indulge in utopias; he expected the experience of the mass movement to provide the reply to the question as to the specific forms this organisation of the proletariat as the ruling class would assume and as to the exact manner in which this organisation would be combined with the most complete, most consistent 'winning of the battle of democracy.'"

The Commune was *“a practical step that was more important than hundreds of programmes and arguments.”*

Lenin proceeds in the second and third sections of this chapter to relate how the practical steps were executed.

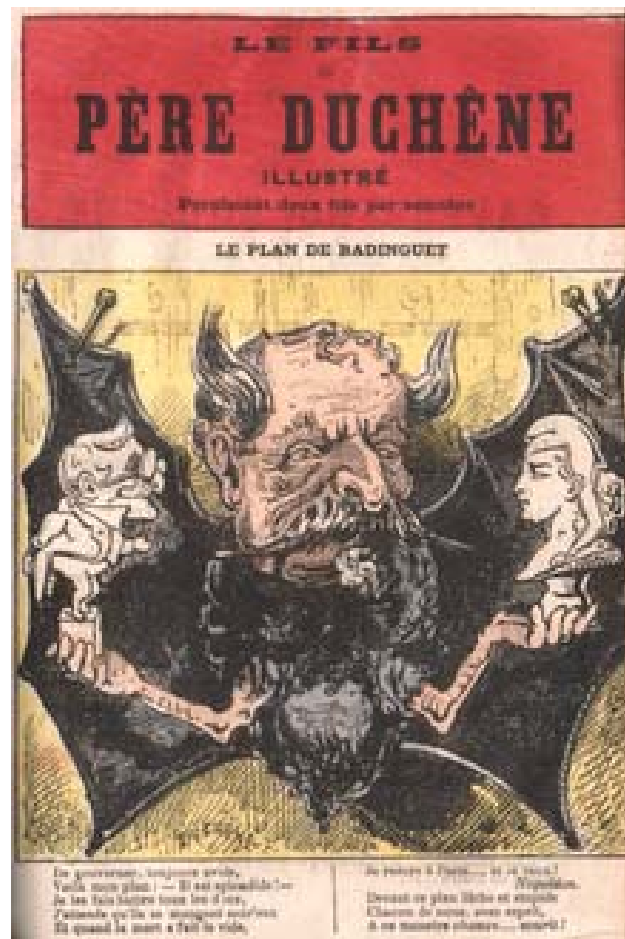
In the fourth part, Lenin addresses the question of centralism and clearly shows that centralism is not imposed but must be won politically, as a matter of free-willing action. All the time, Lenin is carrying on a secondary argument against the “opportunists” and the “anarchists, whom he says are “twin brothers.” Lenin writes:

“The anarchists dismissed the question of political forms altogether. The opportunists of present-day Social-Democracy accepted the bourgeois political forms of the parliamentary democratic state as the limit which should not be overstepped; they battered their foreheads praying before this 'model', and denounced as anarchism every desire to break these forms.”

“...now one has to engage in excavations, as it were, in order to bring undistorted Marxism to the knowledge of the mass of the people,” says Lenin.

As it was in 1917, so it remains in 2015: One has to engage in excavations.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [State and Revolution, Chapter 3, The Paris Commune, Lenin.](#)
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Louis Bonaparte as a bat, balancing Thiers and the Republic

The Civil War in France

In "[The State and Revolution](#)" Lenin goes through (some of) the Marxist classics. He devoted a full chapter to the Paris Commune, basing it on Marx's classic book "[The Civil War in France](#)".

A downloadable file of Chapter 5 of Marx's book is attached, and linked below.

Early on in this "[Paris Commune](#)" chapter, Lenin refers to the Communist Manifesto, pointing out that it was modified by Marx and Engels after 1871. This is what Lenin says, while quoting them:

'The last preface to the new German edition of the Communist Manifesto signed by both its authors is dated June 24, 1872. In this preface the authors, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, say that the programme of the Communist Manifesto "has in some details become out-of-date", and they go on to say:

"... One thing especially was proved by the Commune, viz., that 'the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery and wield it for its own purposes'...."[1]

'The authors took the words that are in single quotation marks in this passage from Marx's book, *The Civil War in France*.'

Lenin goes on:

'Marx's idea is that the working class must break up, and smash, the "ready-made state machinery", and not confine itself merely to laying hold of it.

'On April 12, 1871, i.e., just at the time of the Commune, Marx wrote to Kugelmann:

"If you look up the last chapter of my Eighteenth Brumaire, you will find that I declare that the next attempt of the French Revolution will be no longer, as before, to transfer the bureaucratic-military machine from one hand to another, but to smash it [Marx's italics--the original is zerbrechen], and this is the precondition for every real people's revolution on the Continent. And this is what our heroic Party comrades in Paris are attempting."

Lenin proceeds:

'Today, [in 1917] in Britain and America, too, "the precondition for every real people's revolution" is the smashing, the destruction of the "ready-made state machinery"...

'Secondly, particular attention should be paid to Marx's extremely profound remark that the destruction of the bureaucratic-military state machine is "the precondition for every real people's revolution". This idea of a "people's revolution" seems strange coming from Marx, so that the Russian Plekhanovites and Mensheviks, those followers of Struve who wish to be regarded as Marxists, might possibly declare such an expression to be a "slip of the pen" on Marx's part. They have reduced Marxism to such a state of wretchedly liberal distortion that nothing exists for them beyond the antithesis between bourgeois revolution and proletarian revolution, and even this antithesis they interpret in an utterly lifeless way.

'If we take the revolutions of the 20th century as examples we shall, of course, have to admit that the Portuguese and the Turkish revolutions are both bourgeois revolutions. Neither of them, however, is a "people's"

revolution, since in neither does the mass of the people, their vast majority, come out actively, independently, with their own economic and political demands to any noticeable degree. By contrast, although the Russian bourgeois revolution of 1905-07 displayed no such "brilliant" successes as at the time fell to the Portuguese and Turkish revolutions, it was undoubtedly a "real people's" revolution, since the mass of the people, their majority, the very lowest social groups, crushed by oppression and exploitation, rose independently and stamped on the entire course of the revolution the imprint of their own demands, their attempt to build in their own way a new society in place of the old society that was being destroyed.

‘In Europe, in 1871, the proletariat did not constitute the majority of the people in any country on the Continent. A "people's" revolution, one actually sweeping the majority into its stream, could be such only if it embraced both the proletariat and the peasants. These two classes then constituted the "people". These two classes are united by the fact that the "bureaucratic-military state machine" oppresses, crushes, exploits them. To smash this machine, to break it up, is truly in the interest of the "people", of their majority, of the workers and most of the peasants, is "the precondition" for a free alliance of the poor peasant and the proletarians, whereas without such an alliance democracy is unstable and socialist transformation is impossible.’

The lessons of the Paris Commune are many. Here are some of Marx's own words from our chosen chapter:

"...no sooner do the working men anywhere take the subject [emancipation of labour] into their own hands with a will, than uprises at once all the apologetic phraseology of the mouthpieces of present society with its two poles of capital and wages-slavery (the landlord now is but the sleeping partner of the capitalist), as if the capitalist society was still in its purest state of virgin innocence, with its antagonisms still undeveloped, with its delusions still unexploded, with its prostitute realities not yet laid bare. The Commune, they exclaim, intends to abolish property, the basis of all civilization!

"Yes, gentlemen, the Commune intended to abolish that class property which makes the labour of the many the wealth of the few. It aimed at the expropriation of the expropriators. It wanted to make individual property a truth by transforming the means of production, land, and capital, now chiefly the means of enslaving and exploiting labour, into mere instruments of free and associated labour. But this is communism, "impossible"

communism! Why, those member of the ruling classes who are intelligent enough to perceive the impossibility of continuing the present system — and they are many — have become the obtrusive and full-mouthed apostles of co-operative production. If co-operative production is not to remain a sham and a snare; if it is to supersede the capitalist system; if united co-operative societies are to regulate national production upon common plan, thus taking it under their own control, and putting an end to the constant anarchy and periodical convulsions which are the fatality of capitalist production — what else, gentlemen, would it be but communism, "possible" communism?"

Factual note: What had happened in France was that Louis Bonaparte, the nobody, the returned exile, who juggled the classes and deceived them all, had made himself an “Emperor”. But he ran out of options after two decades in power. He decided to make a foolish war on the Germans (Prussians), who beat the French and advanced to Versailles, outside Paris. The French government then abandoned Paris like cowards; hence the formation of the self-governing Paris Commune. In Versailles, a suburb of royal palaces, the Germans for the first time agreed to form a single German nation, while at the same time licensing and assisting the treacherous French bourgeoisie to destroy their own compatriots in Paris.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [The Civil War in France, Chapter 5, The Paris Commune, 1871, Karl Marx.](#)
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Lenin speaking in 1917

Housing, Democracy and Communism

This fourth chapter of Lenin's "The State and Revolution" (attached, and linked below) presents a study circle with a problem: As short as it is, yet there is too much in this chapter to discuss in a 1½ hour session.

The Freirean requirement from any text is only that it provides a good occasion for dialogue. The dialogue is where the value lies, because it generates socialised learning. We are not trying to learn the text in its entirety, as individuals.

This chapter is almost a catalogue of critical contributions made by Frederick Engels, plus remarks of Lenin's own. The remarks on democracy are particularly challenging. So the chapter provides many topics that could be taken in a dialogue, from which comrades will have to choose. Here are some of them:

Housing Question

"How is the housing question to be settled then? In present-day society, it is settled just as any other social question: by the gradual economic levelling of

demand and supply, a settlement which reproduces the question itself again and again and therefore is no settlement.” [Engels]

Authority

"Have these gentlemen ever seen a revolution? A revolution is certainly the most authoritarian thing there is; it is an act whereby one part of the population imposes its will upon the other part by means of rifles, bayonets and cannon, all of which are highly authoritarian means. And the victorious party must maintain its rule by means of the terror which its arms inspire in the reactionaries.” [Engels]

Monopoly capitalism (remarks on the Erfurt Programme)

The "proximity" of such capitalism to socialism should serve genuine representatives of the proletariat as an argument proving the proximity, facility, feasibility, and urgency of the socialist revolution, and not at all as an argument for tolerating the repudiation of such a revolution and the efforts to make capitalism look more attractive, something which all reformists are trying to do.

...the democratic republic is the nearest approach to the dictatorship of the proletariat. [Lenin]

National Question

Engels, like Marx, never betrayed the slightest desire to brush aside the national question. [Lenin]

Religion

...the party struggle against the opium of religion which stupifies the people. [Lenin]

The State (in the Paris Commune)

"... in order not to lose again its only just-gained supremacy, this working class must, on the one hand, do away with all the old machinery of oppression previously used against it itself, and, on the other, safeguard itself against its own deputies and officials, by declaring them all, without exception, subject to recall at any time...."

"...in Germany particularly the superstitious belief in the state has passed from philosophy into the general consciousness of the bourgeoisie and even of many workers.” [Engels]

Communist and Social-Democrat

Engels wrote that in all his articles he used the word "Communist", and not "Social-Democrat". [Lenin]

Overcoming of democracy

...it is constantly forgotten that the abolition of the state means also the abolition of democracy; that the withering away of the state means the withering away of democracy.

At first sight this assertion seems exceedingly strange and incomprehensible; indeed, someone may even suspect us of expecting the advent of a system of society in which the principle of subordination of the minority to the majority will not be observed - for democracy means the recognition of this very principle.

No, democracy is not identical with the subordination of the minority to the majority. Democracy is a state which recognizes the subordination of the minority to the majority, i.e., an organization for the systematic use of force by one class against another, by one section of the population against another.

We set ourselves the ultimate aim of abolishing the state, i.e., all organized and systematic violence, all use of violence against people in general. We do not expect the advent of a system of society in which the principle of subordination of the minority to the majority will not be observed.

In striving for socialism, however, we are convinced that it will develop into communism and, therefore, that the need for violence against people in general, for the subordination of one man to another, and of one section of the population to another, will vanish altogether since people will become accustomed to observing the elementary conditions of social life without violence and without subordination. [Lenin]

This is a very complete concretisation of the question of democracy and communism.

Image: Lenin in late 1917, probably only a few weeks after writing "The State and Revolution".

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [State and Revolution, Chapter 4, Engels' Supplementary Explanations, Lenin.](#)



The Housing Question

In the period following the 1867 publication of *Capital*, Volume 1, the rise and fall of the Paris Commune in 1871, and the relative lapse of the formal International Working Men's Association (the "First International") in 1872, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels continued to be active and prominent leaders.

The international working-class movement continued to correspond and to meet. There was a [Congress in Ghent](#), Belgium in 1877, and what is regarded in some of the literature as the [Founding Congress of the Second International](#) took place in Chur, Switzerland in 1881 (This was still within the lifetime of Karl Marx, who only died at age 65 in 1883). Between these two meetings the main body of anarchists dropped out of formal liaison with the organised communists, never to return.

Anti-communist bourgeois historians (e.g. the authors of the [Wikipedia entry on the Second International](#)) are inclined to depict a collapse and a vacuum in this period, followed by a sudden re-founding of the "socialist international" in 1889, in Paris. The fullest record of the [founding of the Second International](#) is, as usual, on the Marxists Internet Archive. It shows continuity, and not a vacuum.

Some of the struggles of the time were repetitions of earlier ones. This much is well illustrated by Engels' book called "[The Housing Question](#)" (downloadable extract linked below).

The first published "classic" of Marxism, according to Lenin's judgement, was "[The Poverty of Philosophy](#)", which came out in 1847. It was a polemic against the anarchist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809-1865).

It sometimes helps to regard Marxism as a matter of marking out boundaries, or borders. The first demarcation is the one that separates the Bourgeoisie from the Proletariat, as was done, for example, in the "[Communist Manifesto](#)" of 1848. Although this division and the consequent prospect of class struggle is contested by some liberals, yet most bourgeois intellectuals find themselves obliged to accept it, most of the time.

This boundary is not the only one that is required for an all-round definition of Marxism. From the start, a different lot of liberals, usually called anarchists or "ultra-leftists" but still essentially liberals, challenged Marx and Engels at every point. Their names crop up even before the 1845 genesis of Marxism: Stirner, Weitling, Proudhon. Later, Bakunin wastes time in the First International by opposing the organised proletarian communists.

Now, in 1872, a quarter of a century after the publication of "the first mature work of Marxism" ("The Poverty of Philosophy"), and with its author, Marx's old antagonist, long deceased, Engels finds it necessary to re-launch the polemic against Proudhon, in this classic work "The Housing Question". This was because of a resurgence of "Proudhonism".

Thanks to his own 1845 book, "[The Condition of the Working Class in England](#)", Frederick Engels was already a pioneer of urban studies; so one might approach his book "[The Housing Question](#)" (part attached, and linked below) expecting answers to the housing question. One might hope for instructions about what to build. One might expect sermons about "delivery", or even model house-plans.

Instead, one finds severe polemic about very fundamental issues of class struggle.

Polemic

Let us briefly consider what "polemic" is. The rules of polemic are roughly these: It is done in writing. It is always against another named individual's writing. It is direct and frank and it pays little regard for bourgeois squeamishness; on the other hand, it pays the utmost respect to the meaning of the opponent's words. Opponents in

polemic never misrepresent each other. Everything is permissible, except misrepresentation.

For example, Engels begins the linked text with references to his opponent Mulberger, who had complained that Engels had been blunt to the point of rudeness. Engels concedes little more than sarcasm:

"I am not going to quarrel with friend Mulberger about the 'tone' of my criticism. When one has been so long in the movement as I have, one develops a fairly thick skin against attacks, and therefore one easily presumes also the existence of the same in others. In order to compensate Mulberger I shall try this time to bring my 'tone' into the right relation to the sensitiveness of his epidermis."

But later, admitting that he had misrepresented Mulberger on a particular (quite small) point, Engels lambastes himself as "irresponsible".

"This time Mulberger is really right. I overlooked the passage in question. It was irresponsible of me to overlook it..."

After his remarks about "Mulberger", Engels goes straight into a long paragraph (the second half of page 1, going over to page 2) that contains a summary of theory and practice, vanguard and mass, from the 1840s up until his point of writing, just one year after the fall of the Paris Commune. The paragraph mentions "the necessity of the political action of the proletariat and of the **dictatorship of the proletariat** as the transitional stage to the abolition of classes and with them of the state."

This is the Communist Manifesto all over again. So, we can ask, why does Engels "go to town" to this extent? Is this not merely "housing" we are talking about? Is not housing something that everybody needs? Classless, surely? A win-win situation? Motherhood and apple-pie?

Engels says: NO! Engels says: the class struggle is here, and everywhere.

What we can read in Mulberger, through Engels' eyes, is the petty-bourgeois (and full bourgeois) greed for this Housing Question as a means, or a tool, for reproducing petty-bourgeois consciousness, and this is just exactly how the post-1994 South African Government started dealing with the housing question. Yes, there should be lots of houses, it said in effect, but they must be petty-bourgeois-style houses, both in physical type, and in form of ownership.



The argument about housing is an argument about the reproduction of capitalism. It is an argument about the continuation of the ascendancy of bourgeois values over those of the working-class. For the bourgeoisie, the creation of a dwelling is an opportunity to invest the house with peasant-like values of individuality, and with petty-bourgeois ideas of “entrepreneurship”, and to regulate and control the working class according to these values.

Everything that happened in “housing” in South Africa post-1994 is pre-figured in the banal prescriptions of Mulberger that Engels lambastes. Any critique of housing in South Africa will inevitably have to follow the example of Engels if it is to be of any use. Please, comrades, read the first pages and the last paragraphs of this document, if you cannot read all of it.

As the **Communist Manifesto** says, the history of all hitherto-existing societies has been a history of class struggle. The coming “development” period of South African history will also be a period of class struggle. We may not necessarily win every specific struggle. But what this text of Engels says is: let us never fool ourselves. Win or lose, we are in a class struggle and there is no neutral ground, least of all on the question of housing and land development. There is much more to be studied here, but the key is political.

Pictures: **Shack**, Abahlali BaseMjondolo; **RDP House**, David Goldblatt: “Miriam Mazibuko watering the garden of her new RDP house, Extension 8, Far East Bank, Alexandra Township, Johannesburg, 12 September 2006. It has one room. For lack of space, her four children live with her parents-in-law.”

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [The Housing Question, 1872, Part Three, Frederick Engels, 1872.](#)



Authority

On Authority and Political Indifferentism

Today we have two short pamphlets, one by Engels, and one by Marx, one on “Authority” and one on “Indifferentism”, compiled together in one document, attached, and downloadable via the link below.

Says Engels: Either the anti-authoritarians don't know what they're talking about, in which case they are creating nothing but confusion; or they do know, and in that case they are betraying the movement of the proletariat. In either case they serve the reactionaries.

This was written in 1872 and published in 1874, in Italy. The “politically correct” of the day were saying that all forms of “authority” were bad and must be done away with. Engels corrects this “politically correct” error.

Marx, writing in 1873, also published in Italy in 1874, addresses what he calls “Political Indifferentism”. In this pamphlet Marx first quotes Proudhon and readers can be deceived to think that Marx is approving of Proudhon. But this is just polemic. Marx quotes Proudhon extensively, but only so as to more thoroughly contradict him.

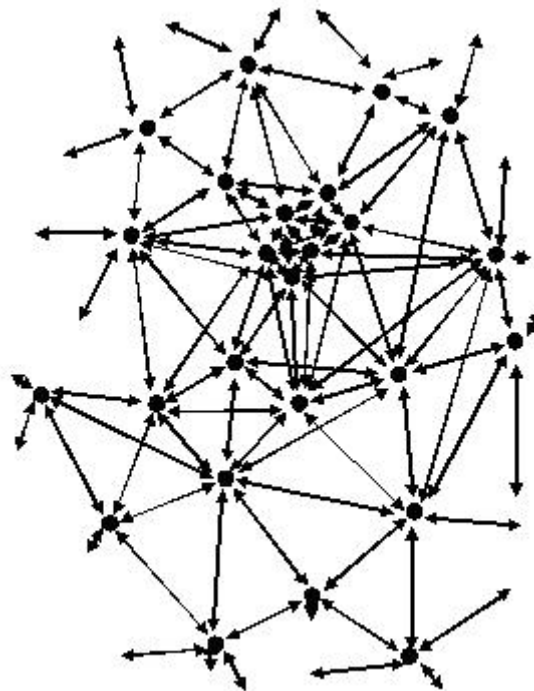
This is a very profound lesson of Karl Marx's. What he is saying is that although, under the bourgeois dictatorship, in the bourgeois democracy, whose choices are all bourgeois choices, yet we cannot therefore say that we should have nothing to do with it, and refuse to choose.

On the contrary, we have to study it with more attention than anyone else, and then make the tactically right choices in the interest of the working class.

In South Africa in the early 21st century, clearly the communists are deeply involved in the politics of the bourgeois state, and Marx would, according to this text, say that such involvement is more than inevitable. It is deliberate and it is right. The communists cannot remain indifferent to what the bourgeoisie is doing.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Engels, On Authority, 1872; Marx, Political Indifferentism, 1873](#).
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State and Revolution, Part 8



Living without a State

*“We are not utopians, and do not in the least deny the possibility and inevitability of excesses on the part of individual persons, or the need to stop such excesses. In the first place, however, no special machine, no special apparatus of suppression, is needed for this: this will be done by **the armed people themselves**”*

In “[The State and Revolution](#)”, and especially in Chapter 5 of the work (attached, and downloadable via the link below), Lenin treats the question of the demise of the bourgeois state, and of the demise of state in general, as a practical matter of immediate concern. The state is to be replaced by “*the simple organization of the armed people*” and the Russian **Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies** that

already existed at the time of his writing the book, just before the October Revolution, were examples of such simple organization, wrote Lenin.

This simple kind of organisation is what we in South Africa today would call **organs of people's power**. There is a lot in this chapter that bears upon the question of how to make the revolution permanent, using such principles. The best way to handle it seems to be to quote quite a lot of it, and then to make a few remarks at the end. So here goes (quotations are in italics):

... in capitalist society we have a democracy that is curtailed, wretched, false, a democracy only for the rich, for the minority. The dictatorship of the proletariat, the period of transition to communism, will for the first time create democracy for the people, for the majority, along with the necessary suppression of the exploiters, of the minority. Communism alone is capable of providing really complete democracy, and the more complete it is, the sooner it will become unnecessary and wither away of its own accord.

... under capitalism we have the state in the proper sense of the word, that is, a special machine for the suppression of one class by another, and, what is more, of the majority by the minority. Naturally, to be successful, such an undertaking as the systematic suppression of the exploited majority by the exploiting minority calls for the utmost ferocity and savagery in the matter of suppressing, it calls for seas of blood, through which mankind is actually wading its way in slavery, serfdom and wage labour.

[Now we can] fully appreciate the correctness of Engels' remarks mercilessly ridiculing the absurdity of combining the words "freedom" and "state". So long as the state exists there is no freedom. When there is freedom, there will be no state.

What is usually called socialism was termed by Marx the "first", or lower, phase of communist society. Insofar as the means of production becomes common property, the word "communism" is also applicable here, providing we do not forget that this is not complete communism. The great significance of Marx's explanations is that here, too, he consistently applies materialist dialectics, the theory of development, and regards communism as something which develops out of capitalism.

Democracy means equality. The great significance of the proletariat's struggle for equality and of equality as a slogan will be clear if we correctly interpret it as meaning the abolition of classes. But democracy means only formal equality. And as soon as equality is achieved for all members of

society in relation to ownership of the means of production, that is, equality of labour and wages, humanity will inevitably be confronted with the question of advancing farther, from formal equality to actual equality, i.e., to the operation of the rule "from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs".

By what stages, by means of what practical measures humanity will proceed to this supreme aim we do not and cannot know. But it is important to realize how infinitely mendacious is the ordinary bourgeois conception of socialism as something lifeless, rigid, fixed once and for all, whereas in reality socialism will only be the beginning of a rapid, genuine, truly mass forward movement, embracing first the majority and then the whole of the population, in all spheres of public and private life.

Democracy is of enormous importance to the working class in its struggle against the capitalists for its emancipation. But democracy is by no means a boundary not to be overstepped; it is only one of the stages on the road from feudalism to capitalism, and from capitalism to communism.

The Road to Freedom

The following statements by Lenin from this chapter spell out the road from capitalism via socialism to communism:

Democracy is a form of the state, it represents, on the one hand, the organized, systematic use of force against persons; but, on the other hand, it signifies the formal recognition of equality of citizens, the equal right of all to determine the structure of, and to administer, the state. This, in turn, results in the fact that, at a certain stage in the development of democracy, it first welds together the class that wages a revolutionary struggle against capitalism - the proletariat, and enables it to crush, smash to atoms, wipe off the face of the earth the bourgeois, even the republican-bourgeois, state machine, the standing army, the police and the bureaucracy and to substitute for them a more democratic state machine, but a state machine nevertheless, in the shape of armed workers who proceed to form a militia involving the entire population.

Accounting and control - that is mainly what is needed for the "smooth working", for the proper functioning, of the first phase of communist society. All citizens are transformed into hired employees of the state, which consists of the armed workers. All citizens become employees and workers

of a single countrywide state "syndicate". All that is required is that they should work equally, do their proper share of work, and get equal pay; the accounting and control necessary for this have been simplified by capitalism to the utmost and reduced to the extraordinarily simple operations - which any literate person can perform - of supervising and recording, knowledge of the four rules of arithmetic, and issuing appropriate receipts.

When the majority of the people begin independently and everywhere to keep such accounts and exercise such control over the capitalists (now converted into employees) and over the intellectual gentry who preserve their capitalist habits, this control will really become universal, general, and popular; and there will be no getting away from it, there will be "nowhere to go".

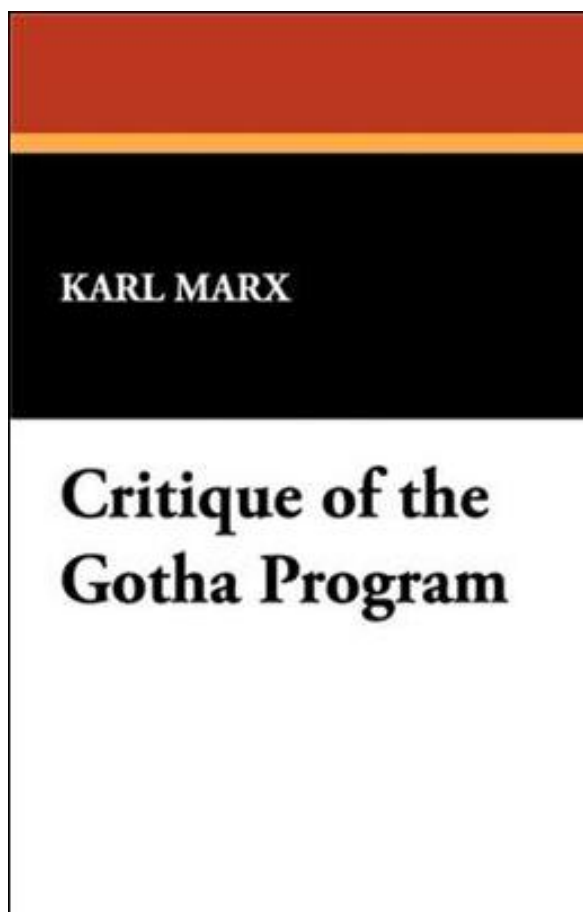
The whole of society will have become a single office and a single factory, with equality of labour and pay.

Easier said than done?

Clearly, the kind of stateless self-organisation of the armed people envisaged above by Lenin did not happen in the remaining six years of his lifetime, and still less did it come to pass in the USSR in the years that followed. It is true that the Soviet Union was constantly under attack, but this by itself is not an explanation. If the free organisation of an armed people is a higher form of organisation, then *prima facie* it ought to be the best kind of organisation in wartime, too. The argument that says that there cannot be socialism in one country is a fallacy to this extent, in the absence of further elaboration.

The history of the Soviet Union and of the other socialist countries, including China, Vietnam, DPRK and Cuba today, can never be reduced to a formula. Yet it does seem that more work of the kind that Lenin was doing on his unfinished book, *The State and Revolution*, is needed. Such work could resemble that of our late comrade Ron Press, in his essay "[New Tools for Marxists](#)", where Ron Press showed how "Chaos Theory" validates and elaborates the theory of a society existing without a State. The image above is one of the diagrams that Ron Press used to illustrate his article. We will return to Ron Press's article in the last part of this course.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [State and Revolution, Chapter 5, Economic Basis of Withering Away of the State, Lenin](#).



Critique of the Gotha Programme

The main text download, linked below, which is Marx's **Critique of the Gotha Programme**, is given here as a supplementary to the fifth chapter of "The State and Revolution". This is the second last; there is one more chapter of Lenin's book to be sent out in this series.

In this case, our introduction can largely come from Great Lenin himself. Writing of the "withering away of the state", Lenin begins by making a distinction between the "polemical" and the "positive" parts of Marx's text:

"Marx explains this question most thoroughly in his Critique of the Gotha Programme. The polemical part of this remarkable work, which contains a criticism of Lassalleanism, has, so to speak, overshadowed its positive part, namely, the analysis of the connection between the development of communism and the withering away of the state."

Lenin takes the “theory of development” as a given, fixed and firm. We as CU may question this finality, using Ron Press’s essay, “[New Tools for Marxists](#)”. But Lenin writes:

“The whole theory of Marx is the application of the theory of development - in its most consistent, complete, considered and pithy form - to modern capitalism. Naturally, Marx was faced with the problem of applying this theory both to the forthcoming collapse of capitalism and to the future development of future communism.”

Lenin quotes the following from Marx:

*“Between capitalist and communist society lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. Corresponding to this is also a political transition period in which the state can be nothing but the revolutionary **dictatorship of the proletariat**.”*

Referring to the late-19th to early 20th century period of legal, constitutional democracy in Germany, Lenin says:

“during this period the Social-Democrats were able to achieve far more than in other countries in the way of “utilizing legality”, and organized a larger proportion of the workers into a political party than anywhere else in the world.”

But then asks:

“What is this largest proportion of politically conscious and active wage slaves that has so far been recorded in capitalist society? One million members of the Social-Democratic Party - out of 15,000,000 wage-workers! Three million organized in trade unions - out of 15,000,000!”

For Lenin at this revolutionary moment the numbers are crucial. The proportion of workers organised, compared to the whole, is crucial. So it is with us in South Africa today. Democratisation means organising. The National Democratic Revolution is a practical job of organising people into democratic structures.

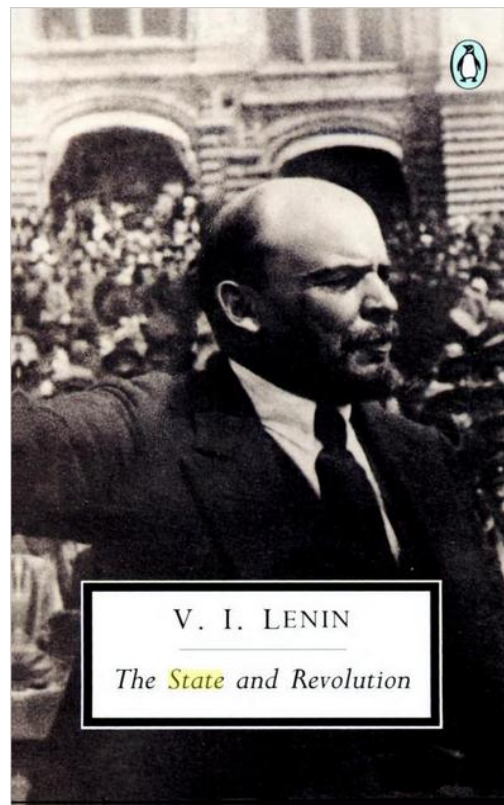
A further practical job is the management of society, where, as Lenin says:

“In the Critique of the Gotha Programme, Marx goes into detail to disprove Lassalle's idea that under socialism the worker will receive the “undiminished” or “full product of his labor”. Marx shows that from the

whole of the social labor of society there must be deducted a reserve fund, a fund for the expansion of production, a fund for the replacement of the "wear and tear" of machinery, and so on. Then, from the means of consumption must be deducted a fund for administrative expenses, for schools, hospitals, old people's homes, and so on. Instead of Lassalle's hazy, obscure, general phrase ("the full product of his labor to the worker"), Marx makes a sober estimate of exactly how socialist society will have to manage its affairs."

This is a point for the advocates of nationalisation to ponder.

- **The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Critique of the Gotha Programme, Karl Marx, 1875](#).**
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Vulgarisation

Lenin at this stage of his writing life (1917) is using the word “Opportunist” to describe the Social Democrats, reformists or gradualists who had nearly all voted to take part in the Imperialist world war. He used the term “Anarchist” to refer to the ultra-leftist pseudo-revolutionaries, but also noted that the Opportunists and the Anarchists were petty-bourgeois “twin brothers”.

Lenin is also writing of “the most prominent theoreticians of Marxism”. Kautsky, a German, had been known as the “Pope of Marxism”, whereas Plekhanov was known as the “Father of Russian Marxism.” Both were by 1917 proven “renegades” – i.e. people who had “reneged”, or gone back on their word. They were supporting their respective national bourgeoisies in the inter-Imperialist Great War (First World War). The most characteristic is:

The Renegade Kautsky

Kautsky... displays the same old "superstitious reverence" for the state, and "superstitious belief" in bureaucracy...

These statements are perfectly clear. This pamphlet of Kautsky's should serve as a measure of comparison of what the German Social-Democrats promised to be before the imperialist war and the depth of degradation to

which they, including Kautsky himself, sank when the war broke out. "The present situation," Kautsky wrote in the pamphlet under survey, "is fraught with the danger that we [i.e., the German Social-Democrats] may easily appear to be more 'moderate' than we really are." It turned out that in reality the German Social-Democratic Party was much more moderate and opportunist than it appeared to be!

Kautsky, the German Social-Democrats' spokesman, seems to have declared: I abide by revolutionary views (1899), I recognize, above all, the inevitability of the social revolution of the proletariat (1902), I recognize the advent of a new era of revolutions (1909). Still, I am going back on what Marx said as early as 1852, since the question of the tasks of the proletarian revolution in relation to the state is being raised (1912).

Summing up, Lenin responds:

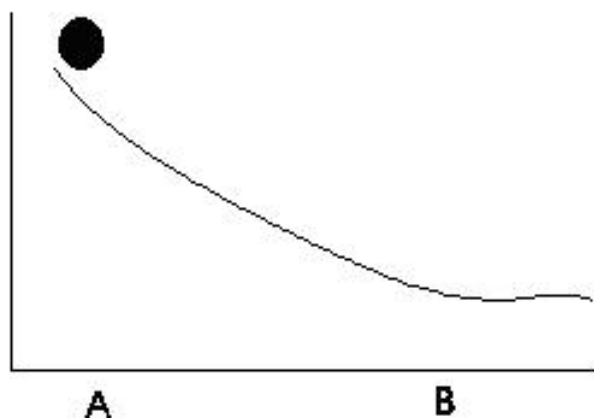
*We, however, shall break with these traitors to socialism, and **we shall fight for the complete destruction of the old state machine**, in order that the armed proletariat itself may become the government. These are two vastly different things.*

We, however, shall break with the opportunists; and the entire class-conscious proletariat will be with us in the fight - not to "shift the balance of forces", but to overthrow the bourgeoisie, to destroy bourgeois parliamentarism, for a democratic republic after the type of the Commune, or a republic of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, for the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat.

The experience of the Commune has been not only ignored but distorted. Far from inculcating in the workers' minds the idea that the time is nearing when they must act to smash the old state machine, replace it by a new one, and in this way make their political rule the foundation for the socialist reorganization of society, they have actually preached to the masses the very opposite and have depicted the "conquest of power" in a way that has left thousands of loopholes for opportunism.

So Lenin knew well the arguments about “shifts”, which we in South Africa have heard all over again, and he knew about opportunism, which we have also experienced. Lenin knew that the armed proletariat itself must become the government. Read the entire chapter in the attached file, or download it, below.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [The State and Revolution, Chapter 6, Vulgarisation of Marxism by Opportunists, Lenin.](#)



Completing “State and Revolution”

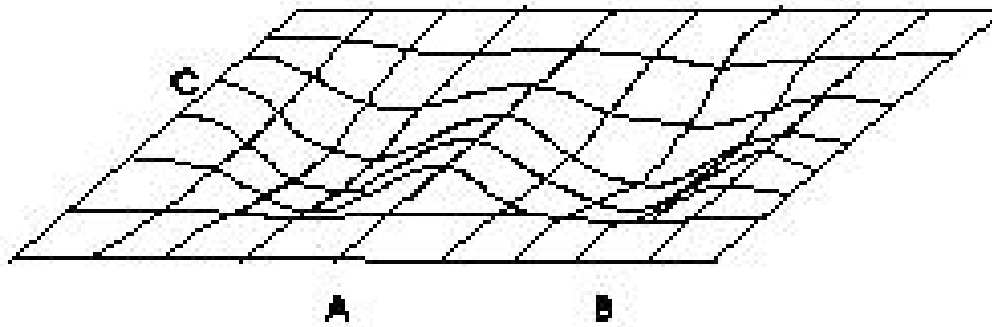
The [MIA endnote](#) to “[The State and Revolution](#)” says, among other things, that “According to Lenin's plan, “The State and Revolution” was to have consisted of seven chapters, but he did not write the seventh, “The Experience of the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917”, and only a detailed plan has remained.”

Alas, we do not even have the “detailed plan” for the seventh chapter. But we can note that “The State and Revolution”, interrupted as it was by the Great October Revolution, is a work in progress. Even if the final chapter had been written, this would have been so. Both the book, and the circumstances of its writing, problematise the question of revolution.

In “[New Tools for Marxists](#)”, attached and linked below, the late South African revolutionary [Ron Press](#) wrote:

*“...the standard Marxist idea that society passes in a linear manner from primitive communism via class struggle to the ultimate victory when the working class replaces capitalism with a classless society is **an unattainable myth**. Especially when a classless society was taken to mean the establishment of order and stability, in fact stasis. The theories [outlined above] indicate that stasis means the inevitable sudden crossover into chaos and collapse.*

‘Lenin in State and Revolution continued the work of Engels and Marx in outlining the parameters which form the basis for the definition of systems indicated by points (a) and (b). It is interesting that they did not define the form or structure which socialism will have. Lenin recognised these new structures when they emerged. He initiated the slogan “all power to the soviets”.’



Ron Press is saying that the theory of the State, and of the “withering away” of the State, in Marx, Engels and Lenin is not wrong, yet these three did not have the full theoretical means to appreciate in full how “stateless” systems can and do work in nature and in human society.

The revolutionaries of today have an advantage over those of a century ago. That being the case, we might imagine a “State and Revolution” for today, that would include not only the material that Lenin would have included in 1917 if he had had the time, but also material that Lenin would have included in the intervening period up to the present time, if he had had the knowledge of it.

Ron Press’s article gives a good start for that work. Please download it and read it. The two diagrams above, relating to the “[Strange Attractor](#)” of [Chaos Theory](#), are from the article.

The matter sits like this: In the past, “stateless” ungoverned systems could be postulated but not described or fully imagined. The “withering away of the state” remained a somewhat mystical, and to its opponents, ridiculous concept. But now, because of the theoretical advances that Ron Press shows us, it can be seen that most systems (both human and natural) operate in fact without a “state” (or king, for that matter) and that the “state” is the exception, and not the rule. Further, the imposition of a “state”, far from being the guarantee of order, is, according to chaos theory, the certain harbinger, not of stasis, but of disorder.

This is an unexpected vindication of Marxism, but a highly useful one. It means that future revolutionaries will have the possibility to see much further forward than was the case in Lenin’s time.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [New tools for Marxists, 1994, Ron Press.](#)



Corporate image of a collaborative project

Living Communism

Bourgeois propaganda would have everyone believe that communism is an impossible utopia, and that class relations as we know them now are all-pervasive in human society, to the exclusion of every other kind of social behaviour.

But, on the contrary, the development of class relations and the State (which as Lenin says, is not only the inevitable product of such relations, but also the proof of their irreconcilability) did not expunge all previous forms of human relation.

Humans already had language, and language is a powerful, stateless system. It has no fixed centre.

There are many other examples of communistic human relations which, like language, have survived, and remain as the bulk of our social fabric. There are even apparently new kinds of communistic social structures appearing, such as the Internet.

What Andy Blunden has done in the writing that we have sampled, for the sake of illuminating the questions raised by Lenin's "The State and Revolution", is to begin to theorise the communistic patterns of social activity, mediated by artefacts, that characterise human social existence in general.

This is the on-going body of humanity upon the back of which the class struggle is carried, for the time being, like the cross of Christ.

Andy Blunden's book (from which these excerpts, downloadable via the link below, are taken) is called "A Critique of Activity Theory". It is concerned in part with Cultural-Historical Activity Theory, or "CHAT", but we can pass over the specifics of "CHAT", and look at what Andy means by "collaborative projects" in these chapters.

Collaborative Projects and Artefacts

Collaborative Projects are how people do stuff. Even capitalist companies are collaborative projects.

One characteristic that Andy Blunden identifies is that collaborative projects are always mediated by an artefact, or artefacts. Artefacts are things made by people (but words are also artefacts, by the way).

What Andy therefore begins to theorise is the social place of things, or goods, made by people. This is different from the understanding of such goods as commodities, which is all that capitalism can manage to do.

Another insight of Andy's is the way that collective agency is both expressed, and also formed, within collaborative projects. We may say that we are humanists, believing in the rational free will of social beings. But how does this actually proceed? Andy provides a description, rooted in politics, philosophy and educational theory.

Our own method, following Paulo Freire, is to have dialogue involving two or more people, centred on a "codification", which is an artefact (text or image). This conforms to the structure of a "Collaborative Project".

But the aim in this course on "The State and Revolution" is not necessarily to follow Andy into educational theory. The aim within this particular course is to consider what may already exist under the shell of the class-divided bourgeois State, so that what will remain, if and when that State withers away, can be apparent to us now, today.

What is the living communism of today? This is the question that is being answered, intentionally or otherwise, by Andy Blunden's writings quoted here.

Somebody on "Counterpunch" recently wrote that "People are more able to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism." Revolutionaries need to change that situation.

- **The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Collaborative Projects, 2011, Andy Blunden](#).**

Course: Lenin's The State and Revolution

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